2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

343 uprights eaten by white ants show that supplies are running low. From a cursory glance from the outside, a native will tell you whether a granary is likely to be full or empty. 'Her food will last her till the cold weather', an observer will remark. 'If she had more than a couple of baskets of millet left, she would get her husband to mend the roof again.' And, in fact, this rough and ready means of estimating the well-being of a village probably does not fall far short of the mark.

The *ubutala* is made by tracing a circle from 16 to 20 feet on the ground, sinking a set of uprights to about 9 inches and binding them together with pliable withes (*ulubango*, plur. *amabango*) inside and out and lashed about 1½ feet apart. A rectangular opening about 2 feet by 1½ feet is cut at the top of the wall to allow the owner to crawl in and out of the granary, and a platform built for a floor raised at about 2 feet from the ground. The wall is then mudded in, and dries in a smooth hard surface in the sun.[1] The roof is built separately on the ground, thatched, and then lifted into position. Subsequently it can be raised up and down at will to allow for the filling of the granary. Two logs (*amapunga*) wedged in position at the bottom of the window level act as a platform on which to stand baskets and other receptacles.

The capacity of such granaries varies. The average circumference of 15 grain bins in one village was 21 feet, the height of the walls to the window level 6 feet, making an average capacity of 661 cubic feet. Chiefs' granaries are bigger, and the four I measured had a capacity more than four times this size.

356 The millet in such granaries is protected from the heavy rain,
343 but not from the damp. White ants attack the uprights, especially those that support the floor, and this gradually causes the granary to tilt over to one side or the other and finally to collapse. A thick layer of cinders soaked in castor oil is sometimes placed beneath

[1] Measurements of a small granary built at Citimukulu's village (June 1934) were as follows: Number of uprights used, 86. Height of uprights, 9 ft. Circumference of granary, 16 ft. Height of floor from ground, 10 in. Height of first transverse binding (*Lubango lua cishingo*), 1 ft. 10 in. from floor. Height of second transverse binding (*Lubango lua cibilibili*) 3 ft. 5 in. Height of third (*Lubango lua mapinga*) 4 ft. 8 in., forming the level of the window. Height of fourth (*Lubango lua kakolubanga*) was 8 in. above the window level, and the topmost withe (*Lubango pa mutwe*) was 1 ft. 6 in. above it. The measurements of the 'window' were 20 in. by 18 in. The whole took two men three days to build.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

the *ubutala* to ward off ants, but more often than not the life of a granary is only two to three years. Nor can rats be kept outside for long.

Filling the granary. All food is dried in the sun before storing. Drying-racks (*icintambi*, plur. *ifintambi*) are built outside each village. These are rough platforms about 6 feet by 2 feet across, raised on uprights 8 feet high, and reached by a notched climbing-pole. On it are piled heads of millet, sorghum, or other crops to be dried before storing. The millet harvest is sometimes put temporarily in a rough field granary (*nkoloso*), usually made of plaited reeds, before it is carried into the village. As the gardens are often eight or more miles from the village, the convenience of this arrangement is obvious. Later the millet is carried into the village by the women in the big round baskets (*umuseke*, plur. *imiseke*) which contain 40 to 50 lb. The roof of the granary is lifted off and each basket is emptied in one at a time, with the appropriate magic of food-preservation (cf. pp. 206–8). When the whole supply of grain has been emptied into the bin, it must be trodden down hard (*ukushindaila*), a process which the natives consider very important for the preservation of their crop. Next, the roof must be raised into position, and the entrance barred with transverse logs.

To take out the grain, the owner leans a primitive ladder of notched logs (*umutanto*, plur. *imitanto*) against the granary, clambers up, removes the barricade across the entrance, squeezes through the narrow aperture, sometimes raising the roof as she does so, and swings herself down into the dark interior of the bin by the platform bars.

Precious seeds or dried legumes are often kept in a clay water-pot (*umutondo*) or gourd, the mouth of the vessel being plastered over with a layer of clay (*ukumashila*). This is apparently an efficient method of storage, and protects all crops except Kaffir corn from rats and insect pests. Another method of storing legumes or ground-nuts is to make one of the grass carriers known as *umubamba* (plur. *imibamba*). It is common to see natives going about the country carrying round egg-shaped bundles of grass tied with a net-work of bark strands, and containing a hundred pounds or so of seeds. The European is at a loss to understand how a ball about 2 feet in diameter can be made of unplaited grass, and how the beans are inserted in the middle. In fact, the method is ingenious. A round or oblong hole about 18 inches across and a

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

CHAPTER VI

THE ROUTINE OF HOUSECRAFT

Housework.

COOKING is an occupation which has to be fitted into a seasonal as well as a daily routine. The Bemba housewife has to cleanse and tidy her hut and look after her children, as well as prepare the daily meals with all the accessory activities which this implies. Over and above, she is responsible, in this particular tribe, for more than half of the agricultural work of the year, and therefore the time she has free for cooking varies from month to month.

The actual housework of the Bemba woman does not fill so large a proportion of her time as that of a European woman. She has, to begin with, fewer material possessions and a smaller house.[1] Her hut is usually round without windows, and closed with a single door. On one side of the door is the fire-place with its three fire-stands and the drying rack above it. Opposite is the bed, a reed mat stretched across a tiny platform raised off the floor. Besides this, she has cooking vessels stacked round the wall, a blanket and one or two garments, and her husband's axe, spear, or bow. The hut itself is not 'lived in' in our sense of the word, except in wet weather. Natives sit and talk on their verandas or in the men's shelters and usually dance outside. The Bemba's house is therefore a kitchen and a bedroom only, and on special occasions a place where beer drinks are held. To tidy and clean an African hut is therefore a simple job compared with the work of a European woman in charge of a three- or four-roomed house, and living possibly in the smoky atmosphere of a town.

Nevertheless, some housework has to be done. The interior of a Bemba hut looks dirty at first glance. The smoke of the fire blackens the rafters of the roof. Dust and fragments accumulate on the floor, which has not the hard surface of the cow-dung cement used, for instance, in Nyasaland. There are no shelves or

[1] From measurements taken of 11 huts the average wall height was 6 ft. 1 in. and the diameter 14 ft. 2 in. The biggest hut measured, that of a chief, had a wall height of 8 ft. 4 in. and a diameter of 17 ft. The more modern type of hut built in this area is rectangular.

2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

356 recesses for storing objects, and dried foods lie in confusion on the rack above the fire, or are kept in pots or gourds standing round the wall. Clothes, if the owner happens to have a change, lie on or under the bed; weapons and bundles of bark are hung on pegs on the wall. Magic charms or medicines are concealed under the eaves. Nevertheless, in spite of this air of apparent disorder, the Bemba housewife has certain standards of cleanliness and 'turns out' her hut quite frequently.

The floor, used as kitchen table, chair, and cupboard, must be swept with a grass brush once or twice a day. Though it is not scrubbed, it is frequently mudded over afresh. This is done sometimes for ritual purposes before relighting a new fire ceremonially[1] and sometimes for reasons of cleanliness only. Small babies are allowed to urinate all over the floor, but adults, even in the last stages of illness, demand to be carried outside for this purpose however cold the night. Sleeping mats are washed frequently and blankets put out to air in the sun. The washing of eating vessels
264 is simplified by the Bemba custom of sharing from one dish. Figures showing the employment of time by American farm workers show that these civilized housekeepers spend a quarter to half of the time devoted to domestic work in setting meals and washing up the dishes afterwards.[2] The Bemba housewife, on the contrary, has only two or three eating baskets to scrub and put to dry in the sun. Pottery cooking vessels or enamel saucepans are rubbed with ashes or gravel. Porridge spoons are stood in a special gourd of water and should not be allowed to touch the floor.

296 The washing of clothes has now become a very important activity to the native, and must be considered under the heading of housecraft. The bark-cloth wraps used before the coming of the white man could not be washed, but a primitive kind of soap made from the bark of a tree natives call *umupape* (*Seguridaca longipedunculata?*), was used to cleanse some of the imported Arab cloth. Nowadays, cotton goods are worn practically universally. Generally they are rubbed against stones in running streams, and in these circumstances it is not unnatural that the white cloth, so much liked by the Bemba, quickly becomes a dirty yellow. Those

[1] A frequent occurrence during the infancy of a small child.

[2] 'The Use of Time by S. Dakota Homemakers', Grace E. Wasson, *Homemakers*, Bulletin 247. S. Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts, March 1920, p. 16.